THE

SPEECH

OF

JOHN THELWALL,

AT THE

GENERAL MEETING

OF THE

Friends of Parliamentary Reform,

CALLED BY THE

LONDON CORRESPONDING SOCIETY,

AND HELD IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF

COPENHAGEN-HOUSE;

ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1795.

TAKEN IN SHORT-HAND BY W. RAMSEY.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

PREFACE.

THERE needs, I believe, no further apology for ſending this Speech into the world than will be found in the firſt pages of the Speech itſelf. For if the motives that ſtimulated me to deliver it are good, they apply with ſtill greater force to the propriety of its publication; and if they are inadequate in the former caſe, they muſt, of courſe, be impotent in the latter. I ſhall only add, therefore, that frequent and numerous meetings of the people for purpoſes of political diſcuſſion, however alarming to the *pretended* ſupporters, but real *deſtroyers*, of Britiſh Liberty, have long appeared to me neceſſary to keep alive the ſpirit, and, conſequently, to preſerve the privileges of a free Nation. Accordingly, I no ſooner perceived, by the advertiſement in the Morning Chronicle, that not only the Correſponding Society,* but the Friends of Parliamentary Reform in general, were invited, than the motives explained in the enſuing pages produced a ſtrong anxiety in me to attend—an anxiety from the uneaſineſs of which nothing could relieve me till I had yielded to its impulſe.

My experience, however, of the baſe and unfounded perjuries of the agents of "*Gentlemen high in office;*" and my conſciouſneſs of the eagerneſs with which certain powerful individuals thirſt for my blood, having long ſince determined me, never, while the preſent inquiſitorial ſyſtem laſts, to ſubject myſelf again to their miſrepreſentations, I took the precaution to carry my ſhort-hand writer with me, that I might be able at all times to prove what were the real

* I was not then a member of any political ſociety. The alarming meaſures ſince adopted by Miniſters, have occaſioned me once more to join that valuable inſtitution, whoſe powerful appeals to reaſon and public juſtice have rendered it ſo formidable to the ſupporters of Corruption.

ſentiments

ſentiments I delivered: and, as it appears to me that nothing is ſo important to the cauſe of Liberty as to enforce the preſervation of peace and order, I ſeize the opportunity which this precaution furniſhes, of ſending the following pages into the world.

Extenſive circulation is undoubtedly my object; and I ſhould, therefore, have been glad to have ſent this pamphlet abroad at a ſtill cheaper rate: for he who diſſeminates right principles and right ſentiments (and ſuch I believe theſe to be) moſt widely among the common people, is the beſt friend to the peace and happineſs of Society. How far I have *acted* upon this maxim let my *Tribune* ſpeak: for, I believe, I may venture to aſſert that no work ever had ſo wide a circulation for ſo ſmall a profit. But the plan which enables me to publiſh this Speech is attended with conſiderable charge; and I have therefore printed it in ſuch a manner as, without confining its circulation to the ſphere of Opulence, might yet cover my expences.

P. S. The unfounded calumnies broached by a great authority in a grave aſſembly, and re-echoed by the literary aſſaſſins of a powerful faction, induce me to add a few words to this preface. It has been ſaid that the ill-judged and unhappy exceſſes of the firſt day of the preſent ſeſſion of Parliament proceeded from the meeting at *Copenhagen-houſe*. The public will, undoubtedly, expect with impatience the *proofs* of this bold aſſertion; and thoſe who called the meeting will, I dare ſay, have the ſpirit, in a manly, but temperate manner, to call for thoſe proofs.* In the mean time, the reader will judge for himſelf what influence ſuch ſentiments as the following could have in urging the populace to aſſault the chief magiſtrate. The fact is, that violence is generally committed by thoſe who neither enquire nor liſten.

* Theſe proofs have been called for; and it has been more than tacitly confeſſed, that there are none.

*** *The SPEECH delivered at the Second Meeting is in the Preſs, and will be publiſhed with all poſſible Expedition.*

SPEECH, &c.

CITIZENS,

IF I had the lungs of *Stentor* and the breath of *Æolus* himſelf, I ſhould not be able to make myſelf heard to the extent I wiſh on the preſent occaſion. When men aſſemble together to exalt the *energies of reaſon* againſt the *force of oppreſſion*, one cannot but lament that they have not a voice that might reſound from the Equator to the Poles, and make the far Antipodes reverberate the accents of Truth, and the maxims of Liberty and Juſtice.

Citizens, it is my intention to make ſome few animadverſions, and to propoſe a ſmall amendment, upon the Addreſs to the Nation which you have heard. But before I proceed to any particular diſcuſſion of the immediate queſtion before you, permit me to make a few obſervations upon the cauſes that have brought me here: for it is not unknown to you that I have of late ceaſed to be a member of the ſociety that called this meeting. The plain fact is, Citizens, that the advice of certain friends, in whoſe judgment and whoſe patriotiſm I can confide, ſome reflections upon late perverſions of the law, the deſire of fruſtrating future attempts to check the progreſs of liberty by charges of conſtructive and accumulative treaſon, and the conſequent precautions of perſonal prudence, have prevented me of late from acting as a member of the London Correſponding Society; and that I have been, in a ſtill more particular manner, prevented from ſharing in its deliberations by the duties of the ſituation in which I am inceſſantly la-

bouring as an individual:---a ſituation which calls for the ample exertion of all my faculties, and fully to perform the duties of which, if I had ten thouſand times the abilities, ten thouſand times the learning, and ten thouſand times the capacity of induſtry and exertion that ever man enjoyed, I ſhould yet be inadequate. But though theſe circumſtances have rendered it totally impoſſible for me to find health, ſtrength, or opportunities, for any other ſerious vocation, and have, therefore, in conjunction with the motives juſt enumerated, occaſioned me to withdraw from an Aſſociation which, as I could not ſerve, I might perhaps injure, by making other men reſponſible for my individual actions ---yet I truſt you will give me credit, when I affirm that I bring with me into this aſſembly, and that I have always retained, the moſt inviolable attachment to the *principles* for which you aſſociate.

Yes, Citizens, my heart is ſtill with every friend, and every aſſociation of the friends of liberty; and if from any maxims of individual pudence, I were capable of abandoning the *principles of Political Juſtice*, and that great actuating motive, the love of my fellow beings, which has once placed me as a criminal and a *felon* at the bar of the Old Bailey, then ought you inſtantly to forget every action of my former life, and to regard me as a profligate Apoſtate, who had made the cauſe of liberty the ſtalking horſe of perſonal ambition.

At the ſame time, I do not think that any individual is called upon to ſacrifice the private intereſts of himſelf and his family, unleſs by ſo doing he can perform an eſſential ſervice to the public cauſe. But if, when liberty can be eſſentially ſerved, any man conſider wife, children, or ſelf, dearer than the public, what is he but one of thoſe proſtituted wretches, who, inſtead of being moved by the generous enthuſiaſm of principle, are enſlaved by the ſordid views of intereſt and corruption?

Feeling all theſe ſentiments deeply impreſſed upon my heart,---venerating the line of conduct which theſe ſentiments dictate, I have, without deſerting any one principle to which I was ever pledged, kept myſelf of late, and ſhall continue, for the preſent, at leaſt, to keep myſelf, unaſſociated and unconnected with any body or ſet of men whatever; nor do I believe that you will regard my method

of

of promoting the public cauſe leſs uſeful, or leſs honourable, becauſe it brings, at the ſame time, a comfortable ſubſiſtence to my family, and enables me therefore to devote my whole attention to that cauſe alone.

Deſerted on all ſides, abandoned by thoſe men of property, who called themſelves Democrats, but left me, after I had encountered the *perſonal reſponſibility*, to bear, alſo, the *expences* of their engagements, I have ſtill perſevered in my attachment to the public cauſe; and though I have varied my *plan*, I have abated nothing of my *zeal*.

It was therefore impoſſible that a meeting of the Friends of Liberty could be called while I was in London, without my feeling a longing anxiety to be preſent at their deliberations, and aſſiſtant in promoting the great cauſe to which I truſt we are devoted. The truth, then, Citizens, is, that I came to this meeting becauſe I could not help it: for till I had made up my mind to come, (and I did not ſo make up my mind till yeſterday) I was the moſt wretched being on the face of the earth. It ſeemed like a crime againſt nature, that the friends of liberty ſhould meet, and I not be preſent to ſhare in their deliberations.

Citizens, there is another reaſon why I am preſent at this meeting. I am not ignorant of the machinations of the tools and advocates of corruption. I know that it is impoſſible for ſuch a meeting as this to be ſummoned, but what there muſt be ſome conſpiracy in exiſtence. Yes, Citizens, conſpiracies there are; but they are not the friends of liberty who are the conſpirators, but the friends of the tottering cauſe of deſpotiſm and corruption. Thoſe are the wretches who will conſpire together, in the vain hope of making the friends of liberty, by plunging them into tumult and diſorder, the inſtruments of their deteſtable machinations. They are the wretches who hope from our meetings and aſſemblies to pick out pretences for introducing that ſyſtem of military deſpotiſm which they wiſh to eſtabliſh over us. I had, therefore, the vanity to hope that I might be, in ſome degree, aſſiſtant in the preſervation of that peace, order, and legal moderation of conduct, which will ſet at open defiance the vain machinations of thoſe who wiſh for tumult; becauſe, without the pretences which tumult might afford them, it is impoſſible for them to introduce that mili-

tary coercion neceſſary for the ſupport of their rotten borough ſyſtem of corruption, peculation, and monopoly, under the weight of which we groan.

I come, therefore, before you, in a ſtate of health which ſcarcely endures the ordinary exertions of my own contracted ſphere, to ſtrain my voice, and exert myſelf to the utmoſt of human faculty, to diffuſe among you the love of humanity, the love of peace, and the love of order: for liberty is only an aggregate word by which humanity, peace, and order, are, at once, conciſely and emphatically expreſſed.

Citizens, there are, I make no doubt, in this aſſembly, and there muſt be, in every numerous aſſembly, certain perſons who, though few in number, are divided into three diſtinct claſſes, to whom the zealous enforcement of theſe principles of forbearance and tranquility will not be very acceptable. It muſt be expected, that in ſuch a numerous body, there will be ſome few, at leaſt, who are impatient for tumult and violence, and who would make us believe that turbulence and commotion, not wiſdom and deliberation, are the engines to be employed by intellectual beings for the attainment of their rights, and the ſecurity of human happineſs. Theſe diſturbers are principally of the following deſcriptions: Firſt, Spies of Government---The tools of corruption! the *Lynams*, the *Taylors*, the *Groves's*, the *Goſlins*, with their long train of alias's, whom the Old Bailey has ſpewed forth to be agents and "*confidants of* "*Gentlemen high in office!*" Theſe are the foremoſt upon the liſt: and againſt theſe you cannot be too much upon your guard. Their's is the palm of duplicity and falſhood: and how without theſe attributes ſhould they be fit tools for thoſe who are deſtroying liberty, while they pretend to reverence the Conſtitution? Their's is the palm of baſe hypocriſy---pretended patriotiſm with them, as with their maſters, is the engine with which they work out their own ſelfiſh and treacherous deſigns. It is theſe (the baſe tools of a corrupt adminiſtration) who fabricate plots of violence, and project impracticable crimes, that they may ſaddle them upon thoſe friends of liberty, who abhor alike both them and their abominations.

Next to theſe are to be reckoned infatuated enthuſiaſts, who, bawling for liberty, without underſtanding its principles,

ciples, would violate every ſacred principle of peace and public happineſs, and every feeling dear to the generous and ſocial heart, to glut the ſanguinary appetite of vengeance, or to ſatiate their own envy, rapacity, and ambition. The third claſs conſiſts of thoſe who, with the beſt hearts, the moſt generous enthuſiaſm, and the moſt zealous love of liberty, are yet deluded by their own feelings, and the artifices of others, to become the tools of that corruption they wiſh to overthrow; and, by their imprudent impetuoſity, promote the views of thoſe who, but for ſuch imprudence, muſt ſhrink into inſignificance, before the ſpreading light of human reaſon, and hide their heads in ſhame and hopeleſs contrition: contrition excited not by the recollection of the wickedneſs of their projects, but by the conviction of their incapacity to carry them into execution.

Citizens, in every popular ſociety, however excellent in its objects, however juſt and noble in its principles, ſome of each of theſe claſſes will always inſinuate themſelves; but, happily for the cauſe of liberty---happily for thoſe great principles, for which I truſt (if the dire neceſſity ever ſhould arrive) every Briton will be ready to "pour out his blood like water"---happily for the Triumph of Juſtice---for the intereſts of the human race---for the generous ſyſtem of equality, to which we are devoted, men of this deſcription have never been able to gain any aſcendancy in the popular Societies which have been the objects of miniſterial terror, and inquiſitorial perſecution. Happily for this great cauſe, all the leaders of the different Societies who were implicated in the late ridiculous charges of High Treaſon, were enabled to prove, that they had always ſteadily oppoſed every propoſition that bordered upon violence; and, if they had not been able ſo to prove, the late trials might not, perhaps, have terminated as they did: a corrupt, tyrannical, and uſurping adminiſtration, might have triumphed with Robeſperian fury; gibbets and executions might have preſented themſelves to your eyes in every direction; the ſtreets of London might have flowed with blood; and a military deſpotiſm, at this inſtant eſtabliſhed, might have prevented you from meeting in this peaceful manner to demand, with the omnipotent voice of public reaſon, the reſtoration of your rights, and the amelioration of your condition.

condition. To point out to you the neceſſity of perſevering in theſe principles, of uniting the love of order with the love of liberty, and the tendereſt ſolicitude for the peace and happineſs of your fellow-citizens with the moſt determinate zeal and perſeverance, in demanding your rights, I ſtand once more before you; obedient to the call that ſummons to this ſpot the Friends of Parliamentary Reform.

Let it not, however, be ſuppoſed that while I wiſh to recommend to you a ſcrupulous reſpect for peace and order, that I wiſh to repreſs the generous ardour and enthuſiaſm in behalf of liberty, with which I know your boſoms are at this time burning. No, Citizens, I would increaſe that enthuſiaſm, I would diſſeminate that ardour, and I would ſteel with tenfold fortitude that determination which I know you feel---that reſolution with which I know you have all ſolemnly ſworn, upon the altar of your own generous hearts, to live free or die! I would fan, not extinguiſh, that ſacred fire of freedom, which ſhould glow in every boſom—"flame in the breath, and lighten in the eyes" of all who call themſelves Britons!—nay, of all who wear the form of man! But I am convinced, Citizens, that the moſt ardent enthuſiaſm in the cauſe of liberty is perfectly conſiſtent with the utmoſt zeal for humanity and benevolence. Nay, humanity and benevolence are indeed the ſoul of that virtuous ſyſtem of which liberty is but the organ: for what is the object of our enquiries, our anxieties, and our labours? Is it not to promote the happineſs of mankind? Which of us would neglect his ordinary occupations, fly from the embraces of a wife, and the endearments of his family, forego the peaceful calm of obſcurity and domeſtic enjoyment, and, with a baſtille before his eyes, and an axe over his head, bathe his ſoul in the troubles of political controverſy, for an object leſs important than the rights and happineſs of man? And can this happineſs be enjoyed; can theſe rights be ſecure in the midſt of carnage and devaſtation? No: The liberty you ſeek is the emancipation and happineſs of the human race. This alone can ſatisfy you: nor will you be amuſed with a ſound, and loſe the ſubſtance. To gain leſs than this is to gain nothing: and without the peaceful poſſeſſion of theſe rights, and the ſecurity of this happineſs, changes of men, and abolitions of forms and ceremonies,

remonies, are but changes of tyranny, and tranſitions of oppreſſion. The eſſence of liberty is juſtice and felicity, and without this eſſence the name is nothing.—For what are words?—what are ſounding ſyllables? *Pitt*, *Dundas*, and *Wyndham* can give you enough of theſe. They can talk of liberty. *Reeves* and his aſſociators can alſo talk of liberty: aye, and of property too, at the very time when corruption, venality and peculation are undermining both.

It is the ſubſtance, then, not the word that you are to purſue; and that ſubſtance is the happineſs, welfare, and proſperity of mankind. The univerſal diffuſion of equal rights and equal laws, which ſmooth the rugged aſperities of unequal conditions, and make man, wherever he beholds the form of man, perceive a brother, a friend;—a being, in ſhort, entitled to the ſame rights with himſelf, and to the ſame protection in the enjoyment and maintenance of his opinions.

Theſe, Citizens are the principles I wiſh to enforce. I would teach you how to obtain, upon theſe principles, the redreſs of all your grievances; for I am as well aware as any man preſent, how great your miſeries and diſaſters are: nay, I will venture to ſay, that few of you know the extent and deſperation of your calamity.

The preſſure of your preſent miſery you feel—for who can be inſenſible to the ſharp and biting anguiſh with which War and Corruption have aſſailed the vitals of the Country? But you know not (unleſs you have ſeriouſly ſtudied the hiſtory of paſt and preſent ages) the rapid ſtrides with which Oppreſſion is advancing to your final diſſolution.

When I tell you, (as I can tell you from the beſt authenticated documents) that, notwithſtanding the boaſts of national proſperity, notwithſtanding our vaunted grandeur, notwithſtanding the audacity with which we are inſulted with panegyrics on the improvements of arts, refinements, ſocial juſtice, and magnificence, there was never a period in which the great maſs of the people were abandoned to a fifth part of the miſery, or treated with a fifth part of the neglect and injuſtice, which they are obliged to endure at this hour; and when I ſupport this aſſertion with incontrovertible facts, with what ſcorn and contempt will you

you liſten to the empty aſſertion, that the common people of England are better off than any other common people in the world.

I have lately had occaſion to examine, with conſiderable accuracy, the prices of labour, and the prices of the neceſſaries of life, for the laſt five hundred years; and, to ſhew you how much *you* have profited by that increaſe of wealth and grandeur, of which your oppreſſors boaſt ſo much, ſuffer me to inform you, that the reſult of that examination is, that four or five hundred years ago (when the wages of a common labourer working in the field was two-pence per day) the labourer with the wages of twenty days labour, that is to ſay, with forty pence, could purchaſe a quarter of wheat, which at this time (could the poor day-labourer, as things now go, ever expect to ſave money enough to buy a quarter of wheat at a time) would coſt him (good wholeſome Engliſh wheat) *eighty-four ſhillings*—that is to ſay, the price of about eighty days labour, according to the preſent average of the price of a day's labour in huſbandry.

Thus you ſee, Citizens, notwithſtanding the apparent increaſe of wages, a poor man gets at this time only a fourth part of the quantity of bread, or wheat, for his day's labour, that he got four hundred years ago. The price of malt has increaſed nearly in the ſame proportion; and hence--I proteſt to you, Citizens, I ſpeak not only from well authenticated printed documents, but alſo from my own actual obſervation and knowledge, the generality of the poor hard-working people in the country (but for whom our miniſters and great men would neither have a bit of bread nor any thing elſe to put within their devouring mouths) ſeldom or never (except in harveſt time) get even ſo much as a drop of ſmall beer to moiſten their hard cruſt withall. The price of a common pair of ſhoes has alſo increaſed in nearly the ſame diſproportionate degree; that is to ſay, though a man in the country by common labour now gets fourteen-pence per day, while formerly he got but two-pence, he could formerly with the wages of two days labour buy a pair of ſhoes, while now they will coſt him ſix days labour, according to the country price of a good, ſtout, ſerviceable article. And whoſe is the

the fault do ye think, Citizens—the tradeſman's—the ſhopkeeper's? No, Citizens:—I tell you no. The poor tradeſman and ſhopkeeper are almoſt as much oppreſſed and ruined as you are yourſelves. The fault is in the corruption that has poiſoned the government and conſtitution of the country. The ſhopkeeper, the mechanic, the poor ploughman, all ſuffer together, though in different degrees; and to reform the corruption which is deſtroying us is a common cauſe, in which we ought all to unite heart and hand together; for there is no other way to work out our political ſalvation.

Convinced of the truth of this ſtatement, I cannot but feel for the miſery of thoſe who are inſolently called the lower orders of ſociety, becauſe Oppreſſion has made them the baſis and foundation upon which the luxury and ſplendor of political plunderers have been erected; and becauſe it appears conſiſtent with the pride of tyranny to reproach, inſult, and treat with ignominy, the moſt reſpectable claſs of human beings, merely, it ſhould ſeem, on account of that very uſefulneſs, without the aſſiſtance of which great lords, miniſters, and wealthy proprietors, would be leſs than nothing.

Thus convinced, and thus feeling for the miſeries of my fellow beings; perceiving, as I think I do, the political ſources of theſe calamities, and convinced of the neceſſity of ſpeedy and effectual redreſs, believe me I do not mean to damp the ardor with which you purſue that object; but I will tell you, according to my judgment, what is the line of conduct by which we may obtain it. It is not by tumult. It is not by violence. It is by reaſon; by turning our ſerious attention to facts and principles; by bold and determinate inveſtigation, not to be checked by idle threats, nor turned aſide by actual danger. It is by the reſolution to proceed like enlightened, bold, and peaceable Citizens, determined to reſpect in our own conduct the ſacred laws of humanity and good order, but rather to die than to ſuffer the turbulence, injuſtice, and perſecuting fury of others to drive us from thoſe principles of Liberty and Juſtice which the force of conviction has incorporated with our exiſtence:—principles upon

 which

which the happineſs—nay, the bread, of our children, and our children's children, through all ſucceſſive generations, may depend.

Citizens, theſe are objects too grand and important to be accompliſhed by the headlong projects of tumultuary violence. What advantage can you receive from pulling down a crimping houſe? The conſequence will only be, that crimps will practiſe their vile art of man-ſtealing with more cunning and ſecrecy, and conſequently more ſucceſs, than they do at preſent. What advantage can reſult from pulling down a mill, or waſting and deſtroying by wholeſale the neceſſaries of life? The conſequence is this:—You increaſe the evil, inſtead of removing it: you deſtroy the means of your own ſubſiſtence: you ſuſpend induſtry; and you injure the cauſe of liberty, by the pretences you furniſh to the ſupporters of Corruption and Oppreſſion, to repreſent you as a parcel of ignorant plunderers; and thus give them a colour for exerciſing ſtill worſe deſpotiſm than ever.

Citizens! it is not a crimp; it is not a baker, a miller, or a malſter, no nor even a few deſpicable and avaricious monopolizers and foreſtallers—thoſe are not the authors of your ſufferings—for beings of this deſcription could not live but for the corrupt ſyſtem you have the misfortune to have eſtabliſhed over you. It is therefore the ſyſtem you muſt reform, not wreak your revenge upon individuals. Revenge and perſonal chaſtiſement, are not only cruel, they are fallacious and inadequate, means of reform. If you deſtroy one ſet of villains, another ſet will ariſe in their place, whom the corruption of the ſyſtem will quickly make as villainous as the former. But if you procure that weight and balance which you ought to have in the repreſentation and legiſlation of your country,—if you obtain annual parliaments and univerſal ſuffrage, it will be no longer in the power of a worthleſs ſet of beings to crimp, ſtarve, and murder you, for the gratification of their caprice, rapacity, and ambition!

Adhere then to reaſon and to the principles of truth and juſtice; for theſe are the principles of Liberty: and be well aſſured, that when the principles of Liberty ſhall be well underſtood throughout the country---when facts ſhall be

be known, and cauſes properly inveſtigated, it will be no longer in the power of tyrannical miniſters to oppreſs you under the ſemblance of Liberty; or in the words of the Poet to "Make us ſlaves and tell us 'tis our charter."—When thoſe principles ſhall be properly underſtood, mankind will ſee and abhor the wickedneſs and deformity of the preſent ſyſtem, and inſtruments will no longer be found by whom the oppreſſions we groan under can be carried on.

Well then, Citizens, for what purpoſes do you meet? Certainly not at this moment to redreſs your wrongs upon the ſpot, but to ſeek the means of redreſs: and to point out thoſe means to you I believe will be the beſt act of friendſhip that can be done towards you. This, it is true, is no eaſy taſk; but let us enquire till we have found it out. One thing, at leaſt, I think we muſt already have diſcovered; namely, that in the preſent aggravated ſtate of oppreſſion and miſery the wrongs of mankind cannot be redreſſed in detail. They muſt be redreſſed by wholeſale:—that is to ſay, by the removal of the cauſe: for it is impoſſible for any human being, or aſſociation of human beings to have the power or the means of relieving, one by one, all the calamities he beholds. The real lover of mankind muſt therefore labour to redreſs their wrongs by purifying the fountains of political diſpenſation. What are theſe impure and polluted fountains? Parliamentary Corruption!—the ſyſtem of Cabinet intrigue!—the ſyſtem of Rotten Boroughs! It is by theſe that the people are deprived of their right of electing thoſe who are to make the laws by which they are to be governed; and the conſequence of this privation is, as might naturally be expected, that thoſe who make the laws pay no attention to the intereſts of thoſe who have no influence in appointing them to make them. Be aſſured then, it is by the diſcuſſion of principle alone, by laying the axe of reaſon to the root of the tree of corruption, that the blaſting foliage of luxury, and the poiſonous fruit of oppreſſion can be deſtroyed. This is not to be done by tumultuary raſhneſs, by perſonal animoſity, malevolence, or faction. It is to be effected only by a ſteady adherence to reaſon, truth and juſtice: and whoſoever, by the violation of theſe principles, gives a handle to the tools of deſ-

potiſm for exerciſing their beloved ſyſtem of oppreſſive coercion, whatever may be his motives, his ſincerity, or his zeal, is, in effect, an enemy to the cauſe of freedom, and not a friend. I do not mean any particular application in this obſervation. I mean it as a general caution, and I preſs it the more particularly upon your minds at this time, becauſe it can rarely happen that I ſhould have an opportunity of meeting ſo large a number of my fellow Citizens, and I am anxious that I ſhould not meet them now in vain.

Mark then, I pray you, what misfortunes have fallen upon a neighbouring country, from the neglect of theſe precautions—from being, in fact, leſs influenced by principle than by faction. Glorious principles, it is true, have been broached in the ſtruggles of that country; and whatever danger may in this age of perſecution attach to ſo honeſt a declaration, I proclaim in the face of heaven and earth, in the broad blaze of day, and what more than all I reverence, in the preſence of this concourſe of my fellow beings, that I venerate, I eſteem, I adore the principles upon which the French Revolution has been eſtabliſhed. But thoſe principles, though talked of by a few, have unhappily never been conſidered by the many; and the people of *France*, though they were ſenſible of their wrongs, and eaſily found out the way to rid themſelves of one tyranny, have not yet found out the effectual means of preventing the uſurpations of another. Neither can it be diſguiſed, that from the diſaſterous circumſtance of being led by perſonal faction, and ſtimulated by ſuſpicion, animoſity and ambition, it has hitherto happened, that the men with the beſt principles have adopted the worſt conduct.

What has been the conſequence? Faction after faction has triumphed in the blood of its predeceſſors—the mountain has prevailed over the valley, and the valley over the mountain; and during the ſpace of ſix ſucceſſive years they have been cutting each others throats, upon perſonal diſputes, and queſtions of ambitious aſcendancy, till the public mind appears to have grown ſick and weary of the conteſt, and the real object of their firſt and wiſe purſuit has vaniſhed almoſt out of ſight. This is, I confeſs, a melancholy, but it is too evident a truth: for look at their newly

accepted

accepted Conſtitution, and tell me---what have they done at laſt? Have they not abandoned the glorious principle of equality? Have they not quietly reſigned the principle of univerſal ſuffrage? a principle which, I hope, from the long and peaceful diſcuſſion we have enjoyed, is becoming ſo deeply engrafted in our hearts, that we ſhall never part with it but with our exiſtence; nor ever ceaſe by every manly exertion to ſeek the full enjoyment of a right ſo important and indiſpenſible.

Yet look how tamely this has been relinquiſhed. See from this fatal prevalence of turbulence, faction, and perſonal animoſity how inadequately the deluded people of *France* can ſtill proportion their anxiety to different objects. A Conſtitution has lately been preſented to France: A Conſtitution not of principles, but of expedients! An infamous diſtinction has been drawn between people poſſeſſing property and thoſe who poſſeſs none. That is to ſay, no man is to be entitled to a vote—no man is to be conſidered as a Citizen who does not pay what is called direct or perſonal contribution to the exigencies of the ſtate: not recollecting that the men who poſſeſs no acknowledged property, are the men who create the property of all the reſt: and that therefore, if no right of ſuffrage is given to any man, but who, from his perſonal property, is able to pay a proportion of the direct taxes, you thereby deprive the moſt valuable, and therefore the moſt reſpectable portion of the community of all hope of fair and impartial protection;—of all hope of juſt and equal laws. Nay, this very diſtinction between direct and indirect taxes is, in itſelf, an impoſing artifice; for the fact is, that all taxes ultimately fall, not upon the *conſumer*, but upon the *producer*: that is to ſay, upon thoſe who toil in the field and at the loom; and who pay no direct contribution, though ultimately the whole of the contribution is paid by their creating toil. To the ſame Conſtitution was added, an uſurping decree reſpecting the re-election of two-thirds of the preſent Convention. Thus we ſee that theſe men, having the power of ariſtocracy in their hands, though without calling themſelves ariſtocrats, have imbibed the ſelfiſh deſire of preſerving to themſelves, as long as poſſible, the advantages

of

of that power.——And this, by the way, ſhews you the neceſſity of annual parliaments, and of diſdaining all pretences by which the right of annual election can be invaded, and taken from you.

But let us compare the importance of theſe two objects together: the decree about the two-thirds operates upon one-third for ſix, and upon the other for twelve months only. But what is the effect of abandoning univerſal ſuffrage? It is a perpetual abandonment of equality!—And without equality, what are we but reptiles, trodden under the feet of imperious maſters, without the free and manly opportunity of lifting up our voices againſt the moſt intolerable ſlavery that may be put upon us?—Remember, I do not mean equality of property. That is totally impoſſible in the preſent ſtate of human intellect and induſtry; and if once you could be ſeduced to attempt a ſyſtem ſo wild and extravagant, you could only give to rafcals and cut-throats an opportunity, by general pillage and aſſaſſination, of transferring all property into their own hands, and eſtabliſhing a tyranny more intolerable than any thing of which you now complain. The equality I mean, is the equality of rights—the equality which ſays, that a man without a ſhilling is as valuable in ſociety as he who has 50,000l. a year—the equality which protects the poor againſt the inſults and oppreſſions of the rich, as well as the rich againſt the inſults and invaſions of the poor—the equality that enables the pooreſt labourer to get as complete and as expeditious juſtice, as he who can pay thouſands for ſtamps and lawyers' fees. Property will always command more reſpect for its poſſeſſor than it ought: and therefore the laws ought not to encreaſe this influence, but diminiſh it: and if any preference in point of protection and privilege is created, it ought to be in favour of the poor; for they are moſt in want of it. This then is the equality I mean: the equality of rights, not of property. I know the *Lynams*, the *Taylors*, and the *Reeveses*, would fain put a different interpretation upon this ſentiment; and perhaps before twilight information may be lodged at the Privy Council, that I am making an inflammatory harangue to perſuade you to level property

perty, and murder all the proprietors. But I have taken care, by having a ſhort-hand writer at my elbow, that they ſhall not be able to prove me to have ſaid any thing that I do not ſay: for I have had ſufficient proof that the ſyſtematic method of giving evidence with the honourable fraternity of *ſpies*, or more properly ſpeaking of *inventors*, is to omit every thing that does paſs, and to ſwear to every thing that does not.

Well then, Citizens, the re-election of the two-thirds affects the future legiſlature, as to one-third of its members for ſix months, and another for twelve. But the abandonment of the principle of equality—the abandonment of the right of univerſal ſuffrage affects all poſterity to the end of time:—ſo long, at leaſt, as that Conſtitution ſhall be in exiſtence. And yet though THOMAS PAINE, that great Apoſtle of the Rights of Man! that glorious luminary, not of the political *hemiſphere* only, but of the world; for the cheering light of his reaſon, like the ſun, has viſited impartially, the oppoſite portions of the globe!—Though Paine wrote upon this ſubject one of the moſt perſpicuous treatiſes that was ever penned, and delivered in the Convention one of the moſt demonſtrative ſpeeches that ever was heard, in favour of the equal rights of the ſpecies—Though he has clearly proved—if proof of ſuch a fact were wanted, that this right of ſuffrage is the inherent attribute of man---or, in his own emphatic words, that "Man is himſelf the origin and the evidence of this right." That "it appertains to him in right of his exiſtence," and that "his perſon is his title deed,"---yet this univerſal ſuffrage they have ſilently relinquiſhed; and to theſe arguments they have paid no attention. Party ſquabbles, and party diſputes they have attended to enough---ſo as to run the hazard of being made tools and inſtruments of the reſtoration of royalty: that is to ſay, (ſpeaking of *France*, remember, not of *England*) the reſtoration of deſpotiſm: for the monarchy of France was a deſpotic monarchy. This hazard---this danger they madly encountered upon this queſtion of perſonal faction, while the general queſtion---the right of univerſal ſuffrage, that glorious principle of equality for which they have been ſo long contending,

they

they ſuffered to die away in ſilence, as if unworthy of a moment's thought.

Citizens, for this and many other errors which have blemiſhed the bright courſe of the French Revolution, they have an excuſe in *France* which can never be pleaded in *England*, if we ſhould ſuffer ourſelves to be plunged into ſimilar calamities. From the particular circumſtances and ſituation of that country, political diſcuſſion, was, in reality, what it has been attempted to make it here, a crime; and the people were obliged to begin to act before they began to reaſon. This muſt always be the caſe where deſpotiſm ſilences the voice and the preſs. When men are forbidden to ſeek redreſs from reaſon and enquiry, they have no other reſource but to break their chains on the heads of their oppreſſors: they are obliged to plunge into tumult and violence before they can begin to ſpeak; and, when tumult and violence begin, the level courſe of reaſon and enquiry cannot properly flow. That candour, that moderation, that diſpoſition to tolerate oppoſing ſentiments, ſo neceſſary for the diſcovery of truth, and the underſtanding of expanſive principles, can never be expected in the heat and fury of inſurrection. Faction, the child of Turbulence and miſguided Zeal, uſurps the dominion of the public mind, and intellectual improvement, with an exception alone to the talent of popular eloquence, is almoſt at a ſtand. But we, in England, in this reſpect are happier. Political diſcuſſion has long been common among Engliſhmen; and, for the laſt five or ſix years, we have been rapidly weaning ourſelves from thoſe perſonal diſputes which too long engroſſed our attention, and have been turning our minds to general principles. For us, therefore, to loſe ſight of theſe principles, in the factious contentions of perſonal attachment or perſonal animoſity, would be an offence without pardon, and into which nothing but precipitate violence can poſſibly plunge us. Keep clear then, citizens, of all tumultuary proceedings and violent reſolutions; keep clear alſo of perſonal factions, groundleſs ſuſpicions, rancour, animoſity, and furious denunciation. Fix your attention on principles, not on men. Remember that no man ought to be of ſo much

conſequence

conſequence as to draw your attention from the general object: and remember alſo, that you fall into this error as completely when you precipitately denounce, as when you implicitly confide. Keep theſe principles, citizens, in view, and you muſt triumph; for the cauſe of liberty is the cauſe of Truth—and Truth, when ſhe exerts her perfect energies, is omnipotent.

Having thus completed all I have to ſay relative to the general principle, permit me to obſerve that, upon hearing your addreſs, two things ſtruck me, which, according to my judgment, are open to ſome miſinterpretation and cenſure. From what I have already ſaid, you will perceive that it appears to me that nothing is ſo deſirable as preſerving peace and tranquility; and ſuffer me to add, as my firm conviction, that it is only by departing from theſe that you can poſſibly be diſappointed. Go into what quarter of the country you will—go into what ſort of ſociety you pleaſe—go even into the playhouſes (lately the head-quarters of ariſtocracy), and ſee how the torrent of popular opinion is changing in our favour---hear with what applauſe and attention every democratic ſentiment is received, and with what languor every ſentiment of ariſtocratic domination is endured*. Every day the friends of deſpotiſm are leſs numerous, while the friends of liberty are encreaſing. It is, therefore, the intereſt of the advocates of corruption to throw you into confuſion; and it is your intereſt to preſerve peace and order. Permit me, therefore, to obſerve, that there are two expreſſions in your addreſs which appear to me objectionable. In one of theſe paſſages you ſay, "you have lives," which you are ready to expoſe in the cauſe you are engaged in. I do not mean to intimidate you, Citizens---nor to preach up paſſive obedience. It is good to be ready---to be determined to relinquiſh life rather than liberty. But let us not, therefore, appear forward to provoke ſo fatal an arbitrement. Let us cultivate our reaſon; and, if violence comes, let it come from our oppreſſors; and that, in ſo barefaced and

* The imprudent violence committed by ſome uninformed men, on Thurſday laſt, has, *for a while*, turned the current in the theatres once more. But this, inſtead of weakening, ſtrengthens my argument.

unprovoked a way, that all moderate men may be compelled to cry out againſt them. Let us be prepared to meet ſuch an event with fortitude, and to repel it like Britons: but let us be ſo far from being eager for it, as not even to give the provocation of treating it as probable that we ſhould ever be reduced to ſuch a dilemma.

To this paſſage then I have a general objection.--- There is another to which I ſhall move a particular amendment; which will merely conſiſt in leaving out a few words. The paſſage I allude to runs as follows: "The comfortable "and pleaſing proſpects reſulting from an abundant harveſt "have turned out to be vain and fallacious." Citizens, I believe the harveſt, generally ſpeaking, has been abundant. In the Iſle of Wight, and in thoſe parts of Suſſex and Hampſhire which I have ſeen, there has been no room for complaint; and the accounts I have received from perſons who have witneſſed the harveſts in other parts are ſimilar. A few fields, it is true, that were overflowed by the inundations, during the laſt winter, were thereby deſtroyed; but they are nothing in compariſon with the general produce. "The comfortable and pleaſing proſpects of "an abundant harveſt," however, it is true, "have "turned out to be vain and fallacious." The Vendeans, the rebels and ruffians of Britanny, the lurking Chouans, the midnight murderers and deſtroyers, who ſtill keep awake the languid flame of ariſtocratic inſurrection in an infatuated part of France, have reaped the advantage of this abundance. For them we have eſtabliſhed regular magazines upon our coaſts: for them, and for our mad and deſperate foreign expeditions, the peaſant and the artificer are deprived of the neceſſaries of life; and, therefore, our hopes have proved vain and fallacious.

The words I object to are thoſe which follow:--- "The comfortable and pleaſing proſpects of an abundant "harveſt have turned out to be vain and fallacious, "*and were probably held out only to lull the public mind into "a deluſive and fatal ſecurity.*"

Citizens, whatever has kept the public mind in a ſtate of tranquility, I pronounce to be good---good for the cauſe of liberty---good for us all. If the expectation of a good harveſt

harveſt has occaſioned you to avoid tumult, violence, and inſurrection, ſo much the better for liberty! ſo much the worſe for rotten Borough-mongers, and the tools and promoters of oppreſſion. For every day of peace and reaſon is an important acceſſion to our cauſe. It is, therefore, that I wiſh thoſe words to be omitted: becauſe they ſeem to convey a cenſure upon the tranquility we have hitherto preſerved, and which I hope we ſhall ſtill preſerve —becauſe I am ſure that tranquility muſt ſecure the triumph of liberty, and the attainment of Annual Parliaments and Univerſal Suffrage.

To this amendment another was added, by Citizen HODGSON, *in the following words:*

" Monopoly, ſtimulated by inſatiable Avarice, and " uncontrouled by thoſe equitable Laws which we might " expect from equal Repreſentation, fruſtrates the Benefi- " cence of our Seaſons, and forbids the induſtrious Poor " the immediate Neceſſaries of Life."

This having been ſeconded, and explained to the multitude aſſembled on each ſide of the Tribune, Citizen THELWALL, *turning round to the group that filled the field behind, proceeded.*

CITIZENS,

I promiſed to ſay a few words to you on this ſide of the Tribune; and it will be only a few words; for my voice is conſiderably exhauſted by the exertions I have already made; and as I have taken the precaution to be able to prove every word I utter, the Speech I have delivered will ſhortly be in circulation, and it is the leſs neceſſary, therefore, to repeat now the maxims I have been endeavouring to enforce. I ſhall therefore only briefly explain the grounds of the two amendments: which are different, it is true, in one reſpect, but agree in that which is the principal object of my anxiety, the rejection of thoſe words which might be interpreted into a repining at circumſtances which have tended to preſerve internal tranquility.

quility. I have, from this conſideration, conſented that the ſeconding of the amendment moved by Citizen HODGSON, ſhall be conſidered as the ſeconding of mine. My objection to the ſentence, as it ſtands at preſent, is, that it implies a ſort of cenſure on the tranquility of the public mind, treating it as a fatal ſupineneſs. I cannot aſſent to theſe epithets—I believe it to be a glorious tranquility—a tranquility happy to us, and to the cauſe we are engaged in—becauſe every day that we go on in the courſe of reaſon and enquiry—every day that we can keep clear of violence and tumult, we increaſe in our ſtrength. I therefore approve of whatever has kept the people in a ſtate of tranquility, becauſe, in addition to the abhorence which every humane and good man muſt feel for the diſmal conſequences of commotion, I ſee that the conſequence of that tranquility is, that the cauſe of liberty is growing with a rapidity unequalled, and is becoming, indeed, like that grain of muſtard ſeed, talked about in a certain book, which though ſmall in its beginning is now becoming an immenſe tree, covering all the nations of the earth; and to all the nations of the earth, if we give it but the manure of peace, and manly inveſtigation, promiſing the fruits of happineſs and virtue, and of every thing that is dear to the heart of man.

The ground of Citizen HODGSON's objection is this—That the impracticability of obtaining the neceſſaries of life at a moderate rate is, by this paſſage referred to a wrong cauſe. That this calamity does not ariſe ſo much from any failure in the late harveſt, as from the peculations and monopolies which reſult from thoſe unequal laws—the neceſſary conſequences of unequal repreſentation. I agree in a conſiderable degree, in the juſtice of this reaſoning. If you had not a ſyſtem of borough-mongering corruption—that is to ſay, a ſyſtem of political monopoly—there could be no monopoly of trade, much leſs of the neceſſaries of life; and above all, the price of labour would keep pace with the price of theſe neceſſaries. I therefore object not to the motion in its preſent form; warning you at the ſame time, that the blame lies not at the door of individuals, but of the ſyſtem of corruption; and venturing to aſſure you, that whenever you can get rid of the corruption,

corruption, you will get rid of all your calamities together. Miniſterial tyranny, Cabinet uſurpation, monopoly, inſult, diſgrace, national ruin and infamy, will all vaniſh, and the reign of juſtice and happineſs will be eſtabliſhed in their place.

At the second Tribune.

CITIZENS,

Once before, and never but once before, I remember a day as glorious as the preſent: and that was when, with a halter about my neck, at the bar of the Old Bailey, I ſtood forward to aſſert the principles which you this day aſſemble to ſanction with your approbation.

Remember, Citizens, you are in very bad company. You are liſtening to AN ACQUITTED FELON, "the fetters from whoſe legs," in the ſublime language of Mr. *Wyndham*, "are ſtruck off, and who may therefore exclaim with confidence, *now I am white-waſhed*;" but who, according to the ſentiments of another honourable privy counſellor, "is not therefore to be conſidered as freed from *moral guilt!*"—A being, who though no longer confined, as of late, in the common charnel-houſe of Newgate, the common receptacle of the putrid carcaſes of felons, who died of infectious diſeaſes in the gaol, yet brings to you at this hour, in his veins, and in his conſtitution, the diſeaſes contracted in that peſtiferous den. I hope, however, that though my conſtitution is injured, my principles are yet ſound; and that if I ſhould ever be crammed into the ſame vile hole again, to be taken from thence to another place (airy enough you will ſay) to be dangled in the purifying breeze for the paſtime of miniſterial perverters of Law and Conſtitution, though my body may be deſtroyed, theſe principles will be found indeſtructable, and will triumph ſo much the ſurer in conſequence of my fall. If ſo, though mine will be the ſuffering, your's, and your children's, and your children's children's, will be the triumph and the happineſs.

[*Here*

[*Here ſome interruption took place, in conſequence of an enraged bull being driven into the field, which threw the people into ſome confuſion, to which, after reſtoring order, the Speaker thus alluded*———]

Behold an apt ſimilitude, Citizens—

Would you know why *John Bull* has been diſpoſed to foam and run ſo fiercely of late? He is ſaddled with taxes and goaded by oppreſſion. His provender runs ſhort, and his blows encreaſe. And, not being properly informed as to the means of redreſs, he is deſirous of getting rid of his oppreſſions by rage and impetuous fury. This is natural to the brute, but let it not be ſo with the man.—Let yon *John Bull* therefore, run that way: you *John Bull* keep your ground, while I proceed to ſhew you that the way to attain liberty is neither by running away from your drivers, nor your reaſon. Let me ſhew you that the way to attain liberty, is not by being mad and deſperate; but by calmly exerting your intellect in acquiring a juſt knowledge of the nature and cauſes of your oppreſſions. I have told you that this was one of the moſt glorious days I ever beheld, and I will tell you why it is ſo. It is from this circumſtance, that it demonſtrates, to the confuſion of calumniators, that ſo many people of all ages, ſexes, claſſes, and orders of ſociety can meet together, without tumult or diſorder, with but one heart, one voice, one ſentiment:—that every pulſe can beat, at once for the liberty, the peace, and the happineſs of the human race; for the abolition of corruption, violence, and perſecution; and for the triumph of equal rights, equal laws, and conſequently of virtue and happineſs, exalted by reaſon, and united by peace.

I have now only to obſerve, that an amendment upon the original addreſs has been moved and ſeconded; the particulars of which you have already heard from Citizen Hodgson. I have to obſerve to you that, in that diviſion of this meeting which ſurrounds the firſt Tribune, the amendment has been unanimouſly adopted; nor have I any doubt from the temper with which it has been received, that every thing will be concluded with the ſame unanimity

unanimity here—that thoſe who are members, and thoſe who are not members of the aſſociation, that called this meeting, will alike adopt the addreſs and the amendment, under the impreſſion that they carry with them, a decided diſapprobation, at once of all the machinations of tyrannical corruption, and all the projects of violence, and that you will depart to your homes with the peaceful and manly determination to avoid and reſtrain all inclination towards popular diſorder, united with a firm determination to ſupport, by every legal exertion, the principle of annual parliaments, and univerſal ſuffrage; by which, and which alone, plenty and happineſs can ever be extended to the majority of the people in this country.

The principal points I have inſiſted upon at the other Tribune are theſe—that the condition of mankind has been daily growing worſe and worſe; that it ought to be amended; that it muſt be amended; and that the only way to amend it is by exerting our faculties in diſcuſſing the principles of right and wrong: for when men come to free diſcuſſion, when juſtice and injuſtice, truth and falſhood are painted in proper colours, all men will love that which is right, and hate that which is wrong; and of courſe, will no longer be made the inſtruments of injuſtice; becauſe injuſtice is their own oppreſſion, and juſtice their liberty and happineſs.

I ſhall here cloſe my remarks, leſt by detaining you too long, ſome opportunity ſhould be ſeized by the evil minded to pervert this meeting to purpoſes widely different from the wiſhes of the genuine friends of liberty. I take my leave of you therefore; breathing from the fountain of ſincerity, in a yet uncorrupted heart, an ardent wiſh for peace and unanimity, not only to you, but thoſe whom Miniſters nick-name your enemies. I mean the brave Republicans of France—whoſe republicaniſm ought to be no crime in our eyes, ſo long as they allow to us the privilege they claim themſelves, of being governed by our own laws and inſtitutions. And not only to them do I extend theſe good wiſhes, but to the victims of Africa, the trampled natives of the Eaſt, the ſlaves of the Weſt-Indies, and to all the human race---be they black or white, ſpeak they French, German,

German, Italian, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, or Arabic—for I care not what language a man ſpeaks, provided the ſentiments he utters are thoſe of an honeſt heart. May therefore, that happineſs you juſtly wiſh for, be extended to the whole univerſe, of which you are a part: and may your children, and children's children, through all ſucceſſive generations learn to liſp your praiſes, and proclaim your virtues.

AFTER RETURNING TO THE FIRST TRIBUNE.

CITIZENS,

As the diſcuſſion is not done at the other Tribunes; and as it was promiſed that the buſineſs ſhould be there diſcuſſed alſo, be kind enough to recollect, that your deciſion cannot be final till they have done. I glory, Citizens, to ſee that ſo many friends of liberty can meet, and no eſſential difference of ſentiment appear. Different men may clothe their ſentiments in different language: but liberty is the object of all, and that it may be peaceably obtained, is the equally unanimous wiſh. We pant for univerſal peace, for univerſal happineſs; not for the triumph of faction over faction; not for the elevation of one man by the fall of another. We wiſh for principles that will give to every man an honorary eſtimation, proportioned only to the purity and utility of his conduct; and which will, conſequently, inſure the felicity of mankind. Let us then proceed with regularity—with one heart, one voice, one ſoul: as if we were, in reality, but one exiſtence, and each particular individual felt the ſtrong conviction, that we are but ſo many joints, members, and nerves of the ſame ſyſtem, to promote the happineſs, welfare, and glory of which is at once our deſire and our intereſt.

FINIS.